

# National Service Impact in West Virginia

## State Commission

Volunteer West Virginia manages 14 AmeriCorps State programs with 778 AmeriCorps members and two AmeriCorps VISTA programs. These programs address critical needs in the areas of education, health, community development, economic opportunity, disasters, and veteran and military family support. In 2015, West Virginia was fifth in the nation for producing AmeriCorps members. Forty-three percent of fulltime AmeriCorps members in West Virginia got a job or went to college because of their service and 54 percent enrolled in a second year. The Volunteer West Virginia disaster services programs, ReadyWV and West Virginia Disaster Corps, reached tens of thousands of people with preparedness messages, helped 4,486 disaster survivors, installed 548 smoke alarms and deployed 55 AmeriCorps members to serve during mudslides, floods, and a train derailment. The Commission and the AmeriCorps programs it funds trained 10,772 individuals, and the Governor's Day to Serve generated 12,900 volunteers who participated in projects between September 11 and October 10.

## AmeriCorps State

AmeriCorps Members from five AmeriCorps State programs - Energy Express, the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department, High Rocks, LifeBridge, and WV Farm to School - are helping West Virginians build healthy futures. AmeriCorps members provide healthy, local food; teach diabetes self-management; and eliminate food deserts. Across the state in 2015, AmeriCorps members served 298,060 healthy meals, helped 11,731 individuals increase their food security, and taught health and nutrition information to 2,860 youth. North Elementary School's Garden-Based Learning Curriculum is an example of what is possible. Its Farm to School AmeriCorps member meets regularly with volunteer families to teach care and management of the school garden. Each family tracks growth and water level and monitors pests in a garden log, and is compensated with fresh produce from the garden and a sign-up to sell produce at a farmer's market stand. While gardening, harvesting, setting up, and selling at the market is fun for students and families who volunteer, it also meets and reinforces standards of learning, including recording data, using tally marks, subtracting, and developing speaking skills.

Five AmeriCorps community investment programs in West Virginia preserve historic properties, build hiking trails, protect endangered species, give parks a facelift, rid streets of trash, feed neighbors in need, and help people find jobs. At the Stuart Recreation Area in Randolph County, history has come full circle. The all-female AmeriCorps Hands On Team from Appalachian Forest Heritage Area rolled up their sleeves to give the historic Civilian Conservation Corps pavilion a much needed facelift. The original roof that the CCC installed on the pavilion was covered in a carpet of moss, fungus, and critters, threatening the structure. "It's so satisfying when a project you work hard on comes together and looks so good. That's what made the Stuart pavilion so special. Each one of us took pride in our work. We came in every morning ready to get things done," said AmeriCorps member Katherine Sammons. "We restored something that will be enjoyed for the next 40 years." In 2015, West Virginia AmeriCorps members improved 1,730 acres of parks and public lands and 3,968 individuals gained job skills thanks to AmeriCorps.

## AmeriCorps VISTA

The Marshall University Research Corporation's Community has launched a new Health Worker and Community Schools AmeriCorps VISTA project. Its focus is on developing a rural community health worker and community school model that will connect community members and school children with local health care resources, chronic disease prevention, and chronic disease management at the community level. The first year will be dedicated to developing AmeriCorps VISTA trainers in chronic disease management. These members will then train RSVP and community volunteers to be trainers so that the project will be sustainable.

The Education Alliance STEM Hub Schools project is the first of its kind in West Virginia. Eight schools across the state have been selected to be pilot schools for this project. AmeriCorps VISTAs are placed at these schools in teams of two to develop partnerships with STEM-related businesses, develop a STEM curriculum, develop training for teachers in STEM education, and create opportunities for STEM businesses and students to learn more about opportunities for future employment. The fastest growing sector of the job market in West Virginia is in STEM-related jobs. In order for West Virginia to continue to climb out of the dire economic situation facing the state, West Virginia needs a workforce that is ready and able to assume these positions. The goal of the STEM school AmeriCorps VISTA project is to develop interest in STEM at the middle and high school ages to lead to an increase in students pursuing STEM-related degrees and careers.

## AmeriCorps NCCC

In partnership with the Williamson Redevelopment Authority, an AmeriCorps NCCC team helped improve soil quality and construct and take care of garden beds. The mission of Williamson Redevelopment Authority is to create a replicable sustainable community model for low-income communities throughout Central Appalachia. The vision is to connect community stakeholders with concepts of sustainability and to engage citizens in sustainable development. While serving in Williamson, AmeriCorps NCCC members built two outdoor wash stations, constructed eight new garden beds, cared for 22 garden beds, planted 5,745 seeds, and transplanted 4,464 seedlings. The team also educated 200 Williamson residents about the benefits and ease of incorporating fruit and vegetable juicing into daily life. The City of Williamson is classified as a food desert, so the addition of twenty-two brand-new raised gardening beds will allow citizens residing in low-income housing to rent out one of three different sized garden beds to plant fruits and vegetables for the entire year. This cuts down the cost of groceries by giving the residents resources to be self-sustaining and providing the majority of their own produce.

The mission of the Appalachian Heritage Educational Museum is to preserve the original Whipple Company Store, which offers hands-on education through tours, interactive projects, art, oral histories, documentaries, and genealogy surrounding coal mining life in West Virginia. An AmeriCorps NCCC team was sought to assist in the creation of a resource room to help preserve this unique period of the state's history. After training, the team began to clear, sort, and organize the space that would become the resource room. Additionally, the team created a large table for the room out of sewing machine tables and 125 year-old poplar planks. The team then used other old sewing machines to create benches for the room's new computer lab. Using a 120-year-old, rope-operated elevator, the team moved a fragile, 900-pound meat cooler from the early 1900s, out of the basement to the first floor, where it now resides in the resource room. The cooler was scrubbed clean, fitted with lights, and assigned an informational placard created by the team. Additionally, the team painted the resource room, the old company supervisor's office, and part of the building façade.

## Senior Corps Foster Grandparent Program

The Region 8 Planning Council Foster Grandparent Program has 87 Foster Grandparent volunteers serving approximately 500 students. Their activities include serving in after-school programs, mentoring for educational success, out of school time and summer learning, school readiness and early childhood education, pre-elementary day care, and tutoring and literacy. To date, 60 Foster Grandparents provided 62,142 hours of service to 245 children. Approximately 65 percent of the children showed a significant improvement in academic skills. Other areas of improvement were in motor and listening skills, handwriting, working independently, increased positive behavior skills and other areas. According to the child care plans returned by the sites, approximately 65 percent of the children who were served by the Foster Grandparents showed marked improvement in identified areas of need.

## Senior Corps RSVP

The Council of Southern Mountains RSVP project engages 590 volunteers. RSVP volunteers provide a range of key services including companionship outreach; disaster awareness and preparedness and managing volunteers through neighborhood watch groups; delivering supplies to the disabled, and supporting long-term care for veterans at the local veteran's hospital. These visits include sitting with hospice patient family members while giving the family time to attend their own doctor appointments or other personal necessities. Project outcomes include managing 400 community volunteers; preparing 4,577 persons in disaster Services; providing companionship to 340 clients, and supporting 40 disabled veterans.

## Senior Corps Senior Companion Program

The Mid-Ohio Valley Senior Companion program has 118 volunteers providing independent living and respite services in 25 counties. Their activities include companionship, meal preparation, light housework, transportation, scheduling appointments, veterans in-home support, and respite for care-givers. Senior Companions serve 209 clients, including 31 veterans. The majority of the clients are 67 years old or older. In the last year, the program has met or exceeded all of its performance measure goals. As evidenced by the number of individuals waiting to get Senior Companion services, this program provides a vital service to West Virginia's elderly populations.